

# Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: Abbey Hill Academy

Ketton Road, Hardwick Estate, Stockton-on-Tees TS19 8BU

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Inspection dates:

8 and 9 July 2025

## Outcome

Abbey Hill Academy has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

The principal of this school is James Newman. This school is part of Horizons Specialist Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Elizabeth Horne, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by David Walker. There is also an executive principal, David Penny, who is responsible for this school and seven others.

## What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils learn, grow and achieve at Abbey Hill. They are supported by skilled staff, who care deeply for them. Staff have an excellent understanding of the individual needs of pupils. Pupils are safe and happy at this school.

Staff have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. Pupils benefit from an extensive range of academic and vocational opportunities. There is an emphasis on preparation for life beyond school. Pupils work towards developing their independence and learn important skills for adult life.

Behaviour is exemplary in lessons and during social times. Staff help pupils to understand and manage their emotions and pupils do so successfully. Pupils are polite, kind and respectful of staff and their peers. They care for each other. Any rare incidents of bullying are dealt with swiftly and effectively by staff.

Pupils have meaningful opportunities to experience the world of work. They have recently enjoyed preparing stalls for their annual summer fair. Students in the sixth form access work placements in the community. These experiences often lead to future employment opportunities.

## **What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?**

The school's curriculum is ambitious so that pupils can achieve the best possible outcomes. The school has three curriculum pathways that are tailored to the individual needs of pupils. The school identifies pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) accurately so that they access the right curriculum pathway. Older pupils make subject choices linked to their interests.

The curriculum is sequenced well. Pupils learn more and know more over time. Pupils revisit their learning regularly to make sure that they remember what they have learned. Pupils have opportunities to extend their knowledge through their experiences in school, such as horticulture and exploring woodlands.

Pupils learn how to communicate using a range of communication strategies. Visual communication aids are used well by staff and pupils. Some pupils use electronic communication devices with increasing independence. All pupils learn to communicate their needs and feelings effectively.

Pupils read every day. Pupils at the early stages of reading, learn to read using phonics. Staff teach this with precision. Pupils receive extra support when they need it. They access books that are suitable for their stage of reading and their age. Pupils are confident reading out loud to staff and their peers. Many pupils become fluent readers. Leaders are working hard to support pupils to develop a love of reading beyond school.

The school's work to reduce absence is having a positive impact. Most pupils attend school regularly. The school provides support to families to make sure that pupils can attend school. Students in the sixth form attend well.

Staff apply a relational approach to behaviour management. They consider the reasons that lie behind behaviour incidents. They know when to intervene to support pupils. Pupils respond well to the calm, caring approach of staff. Pupils value opportunities to reflect with staff. Any behaviour incidents are dealt with effectively, although this information is not used consistently to identify patterns and inform precise support.

Pupils are taught how to stay safe, including online. Sixth-form students learn how to use smart phones safely. Staff teach road safety every day, using the pelican and zebra crossings that are on site. Pupils are taught about healthy relationships and consent.

Pupils have access to a broad and varied enrichment programme. They regularly use facilities in their local community to enjoy a range of activities, such as swimming, judo and ice-skating. Pupils are supported to go on residential visits to develop their independence and life skills.

Transition to next steps is carefully planned at all points. This starts when pupils first join Abbey Hill and continues until they move on to their next steps. For most pupils this is at the end of sixth form. The school has an extensive careers programme. Pupils explore job roles, meet with employers and participate in mock interviews. Sixth-form students attend

careers fairs, visit local employers and access taster sessions with local colleges and training providers. They are extremely well prepared for life beyond school.

Leaders are passionate about the school and the community it serves. They are dedicated to making sure pupils achieve their best. Trustees and governors have a comprehensive understanding of the school's strengths and improvement work. Staff speak highly of the support that they receive from leaders so that they can fulfil their roles effectively. They are proud to work at Abbey Hill.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

## **What does the school need to do to improve?**

### **(Information for the school and appropriate authority)**

- The school does not capture the follow up actions for behaviour incidents in a consistent manner. This means that it is sometimes difficult to identify any trends over time or check how well incidents have been addressed. The school should refine how incidents are recorded and use this information to further support positive behaviour in school.

## **Background**

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024, graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged to be good for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good for overall effectiveness in June 2015.

## How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

## Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	139974
<b>Local authority</b>	Stockton-on-Tees
<b>Inspection number</b>	10346508
<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Academy special converter
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	353
<b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b>	68
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of trust</b>	David Walker
<b>CEO of the trust</b>	Elizabeth Horne
<b>Principal</b>	James Newman
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.horizonstrust.org.uk">www.horizonstrust.org.uk</a>
<b>Dates of previous inspection</b>	28 and 29 January 2020, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- The school caters for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties, moderate learning difficulties and autism.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school uses one registered alternative provision and two unregistered alternative provisions.
- The school uses a space within a mainstream school, in Stockton-on-Tees, to educate some pupils. Some pupils aged between 11 and 16 years with moderate learning difficulties are taught at Abbey Hill at North Shore Academy, Talbot Street, Stockton-on-Tees TS20 2AY.

- The school also uses an additional site, in Middlesbrough, to educate some pupils. Some pupils aged between 11 and 16 years with moderate learning difficulties and autism are educated at Fairfax Provision, Acklam Grange School House, CLC, Middlesbrough TS5 8PB.
- The school provides a breakfast club and some after-school clubs for pupils.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

## **Information about this inspection**

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school has received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the principal, the principal of sixth form, the wider senior leadership team, curriculum leaders and leaders with oversight of behaviour and attendance.
- Inspectors met with the safeguarding lead for the trust.
- The lead inspector met with the CEO and deputy CEO of the trust.
- The lead inspector met remotely with the chair of the board of trustees and the chair of the academy council (local governing body).
- Inspectors visited Fairfax Provision and Abbey Hill at North Shore Academy.
- Inspectors visited a sample of lessons, met with pupils about their learning, listened to some pupils reading, looked at samples of pupils' work and considered a range of documentation.
- Inspectors observed pupils during break and lunchtime and at the start and end of the school day.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interest first.
- The lead inspector looked at records and spoke to staff in relation to behaviour, bullying and attendance.
- Inspectors met with some teaching and support staff.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View, and Ofsted's surveys for staff and pupils.

## Inspection team

Nikki Heron, lead inspector

Jenni Machin

His Majesty's Inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
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